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Civic Trust Public Lobbying Company strives for excellence and effectiveness. Our ultimate mission is to put into practice community ideas and magnify residents' voices in criminal justice, prison and drug policy reform utilizing collective resources already available to rebuild neighborhoods, communities and the state of Connecticut.

Good afternoon, Judiciary Committee Chairs, Co-chairs and Members.

I am the Founder and Executive Director of Civic Trust Public Lobbying Company. Civic Trust is a non-profit c4 statewide organization that takes civic engagement beyond voting. Our advocacy trainings and lobbying services are free to our members. Today, I am speaking in support of HB 5288 An Act Concerning Children of Incarcerated Women.

Connecticut is one of the 8 states that currently, have a community-based residential program for mothers in the criminal justice system and their children. It shows that Connecticut understands the need for both the parent and children to bond. In 2003, Alison Cunningham and Linda Baker created a study funded by the National Crime Prevention Centre named, Waiting for Mommy: Giving a Voice to the Hidden Victims of Imprisonment. What Cunningham and Baker discovered are results most of know.

- o Parental separation triggered by incarceration is different than separation for other reasons

- o Separation because of maternal incarceration is more destabilizing for children than paternal incarceration

- o The stresses and changes associated with maternal incarceration often act on an already challenged family system

- o Children of incarcerated mothers (and fathers) have an elevated vulnerability to criminal behavior themselves

In 2009, Women's Prison Association released a study, Mothers, Infants, and Imprisonment: A National Look at Prison Nurseries and Community-Based Alternatives. There were no surprises to their findings for those of us who have lived it first hand or wished a nursery program was available inside York, CI.

Women who participate in a prison nursery program show lower rates of recidivism, and their children show no adverse affects as a result of their participation.

By keeping mothers and infants together, these programs prevent foster care placement and allow for the formation of maternal/child bonds during a critical period of infant development.

Most women in prison nursery programs present little risk to public safety. The issues that bring most women in contact with the criminal justice system – drug addiction, lack of education, poverty – are better addressed in a community setting than in prison.

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- Mothers should be able to access educational and vocational services while participating in a mother-child program, as they will be expected to serve as both mothers and employees after their release.
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I speak for those who unable to attend today and those who cannot. I also speak from my own personal experience as a formally incarcerated mother. My children were separated and grew up in 2 different households. As a result, I was able to spend more time with my daughter than my son. Luckily for me, both my children are college educated and not criminals. My daughter lived with family members that were supportive of our continued relationship. My son, who was a year and five months old, at the time of my incident did not. Although, my children did not grow up in foster care, the relationship between my son and I was similar. I had to rebuild a relationship with him at the age of seven. There was no continuation, the bond was dramatically severed and he as a child did not understand, nor did he remember me from the time of my incarceration until he was about 3 years old, critical stages of bonding between a mother and child. I hope you support the passage of HB 5288 ACC Children of Incarcerated Women. Thank you.

LaResse Harvey, Founder/Executive Director
Civic Trust Public Lobbying Company